THE MAN

By John L. Hervey

THE generalissimo of the allied forces has been made a marshal of France—a title seldom bestowed nowadays, but previously, since the outbreak of the great war, conferred upon Joffre, "the victor of the Marne." There is a halo of glory and story about the marshals of France. The title is, in a sense, the product of modern military distinctions. Yet by no means all its wearers have been worthy of it. And it remains to be seen just what degree of greatness that of the new marshal may be. At present, to an enthusiastic public, intoxicated with a rainbow of temporary successes which he has arched above a sky overcast with defeat's darkest clouds, the disposition is to acclaim him a military genius of the first rank.

Perhaps the most memorable of Napoleon's maxims was that famous one, "In war men are nothing; a man is everything!" A man—that is to say, a leader. Something which, until the advent of Foch, the allies manifestly did not possess; whereas, just as manifestly Germany did possess one —several, in fact.

As the great war has dragged its slow and convulsive length along, it has been that crucial question of leadership which has crucified the souls of those who, whether upon or distant from the firing line, knew and felt that unless they found a man—a leader—the cause of the allies was doomed. The great question was, therefore, "Will they find one?" And many were inclined to doubt it. To doubt it on that best of all grounds; historic ones.

Until the entrance or America into the conflict, the two nations bearing the burden of sustaining it were England and France—for Russia, after a disastrous exposition of incompetency, had fallen by the wayside. And students of military history were but too well aware that neither England nor France had produced a truly great commander for generations, and that neither of them had ever produced one of the first rank.

Six men are grouped in history as the world's greatest captains. Of these, three belonged to the ancient world—Alexander, a Macedonian; Hannibal, a Carthagenian; Caeser, a Roman; while three were moderns—Gustavus Adolphus, a Swede; Frederick the Great, a Prussian; and Napoleon, a Corsican.

We must descend to the second rank before we encounter either an Englishman or a Frenchman. The most famous of so-called English commanders was Wellington, but he was neither English nor England's greatest military genius. That title properly belongs to the Duke of Marlborough. Among Frenchmen we have three splendid figures—Turene, the great Conde, and Prince Eugene, the last named, it is true, in the service of Austria and co-commander with Marlborough of the Coalition forces that warred against Louis XIV, but nevertheless French born.

Turenne was without doubt the foremost soldier of France, paralleling Marlborough among the Britons in this respect—and it is interesting to remember that it was Turenne who first detected the genius of Marlborough and predicted his coming fame, a fame that was gained after Turenne himself passed from the scene. But both men stand, as aforesaid, not in the first but in the forefront of the second rank, as commanders. It was long, indeed, before either England or France developed a military genius truly great. During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, we discern famous fighters, the preux chevalier as represented by a Bayard, or the "mighty man of his hands," as represented by Coeur de Lion. But great generals, in the modern sense, we do not find. In France the nearest approach was, perhaps, Bertrand du Guesclin. Among Englishmen, the most talented was Sir John Hawkwood, whose career was that of a captain of mercenaries, a condottiere, in the civil war of Italy.

It is not until we reach the eras of the Thirty Years' War and war of Louis XIV that the great modern general emerges into history, the first and greatest of them in those wars being Gustavus Adolphus, the Swede, whose greatest opponent was Wallenstein, the Czech. Napoleon, by the way, considered Wallenstein a greater man than Gustavus, but he is almost alone in that opinion. Both passed in the early years of the Thirty Years' War and then in due time appeared that galaxy of brilliant figures which clustered around the throne of the Grand Monarque in the days when he was the arbiter of Europe. We may name first, Turenne ad Conde, first in point of time and genius. Following them came Crequi and Catinat, both of high talent. But still more able were the hunchback, Luxembourg, a member of the princely house of Montmorency; and the polished and superb Villars, he of the famous epigram, uttered to Louis XIV as he was leaving the court for the front, "Sire, defend me from my friends! I can defend myself from my enemies!"

The interminable wars of the Grand Monarque ended in the impoverishment and exhaustion of France and a decadence of military talent. During the scandalous Regency there was no redeeming glory won upon the "tented field" to offset the internal disorders. With the still more scandalous era of Louis XV there came a final burst of brilliance in the exploits of Marshal Saxe, who, however, was not a Frenchman, but a son of August the Strong of Saxony, and one of his myriad mistresses, Aurora of Konigsmarck. Treitschke bitterly arraigns Maurice de Saxe as a traitor and a renegade, fighting against his countrymen for foreign gold. He was the last grand military figure of the "old regime" and, in addition, the ancestor of that Aurore Dupin known to the world of letters as George Sand.

After the death of Saxe there is nothing glorious to write of the generals of France until the revolution. Those who fought against Frederick the Great made a sorry showing and defeat became the constant portion of what had been Europe's proudest army. Perhaps this was because les maitresses resigned at Versailles and Marly and its command became subject to the caprices of a Pompadour or a Dubarry. But with the revolution distinction once more emerged—men like Domouriez, Moreau and Pichegru. These commanders were, however, as pygmies compared with the Corsican who soon relegated them to oblivion.

Napoleon, unlike most great captains, was devoid of professional jealousy—possibly because so well aware of the abysmal gulf that separated his own genius from that of the glittering galaxy with which he surrounded himself, the men who shine in history as "Napoleon's Marshals'.' And does not that very designation irrevocably place them? They were, most veritably, "Napoleon's." They belonged to him, were made by him, the by-products, so to speak ,of his career. For the most part, when attempting independent operations, guided by their own talent and depending upon their own resources, they added little or nothing to their fame, when they did not decrease it. Yet their glory will not fade and many of their names remain "household words"—Murat, Ney, Soult, Massena, Lannes, Victor, Suchet, Marmont, Bernadotte, bessieres, Mortier, Davout, Augereau and on down the line, a line of dukes and princes, of which two became kings. Yet Napoleon's own criticism was that the best of generals who served as his lieutenants were Desaix and Kleber, both of whom antedated the empire—Desaix fell at Marengo, by a strange coincidence upon the same day that a fellah's dagger found the heart of Kleber, whom Bonaparte had left behind him in Egypt as commander-in-chief of the French forces there. The great talent of Kleber, said Napoleon, was in some degree handicapped by the fact that he was a lazy man and a voluptuary—but Desaix, had he lived, would have proved "equal to the greatest things."

From the Napoleonic period to the present day, France has produced no commander of distinguished merit, none that approaches any of these men above enumerated. We need only cite the most memorable names to be found—MacMahon, Canrobert, Bugeaud—to certify this fact. MacMahon, who arrived at Magenta in the nick of time to save the day, was made a marshal of France and a duke, in recognition thereof, by Napoleon the Litttle—but when in the Franco-Prussian war a few years later he was called upon to oppose Moltke, his reputation vanished like a wreath of smoke. And MacMahon, moreover, was but a courtesy Frenchman, as his name implies.

England has been at war most of the time, in some or many quarters of the world, since the firm establishment of the monarchy. There are critics who contend that Cromwell was one of the premier generals of history—but viewed comparatively such a claim verges upon the ridiculous. Edward I, the Black Prince, Henry V, are heroic figures of national British legend, song and story, but of small stature when measured with the world's great captains. Marlborough, as we have said, is the one commander of Anglo-Saxon race to whom we must all doff our hats. Yet even here a qualification must be noted, for much of his unaparalleled success was, in the minds of the many critics, due to his collaboration with Prince Eugene.. Based upon his separate operations, Eugene is often quoted as the greater general of these two renowned brothers-in-arms. But be this as it may, the student of the campaigns which culminated in Blenheim, Ramillies, Oudernarde and Malplaquet need not discount the genius of Marlborough, though, following the immortal portrait which Thackeray has limmed of him in "Henry Esmond," he may despise him as a man. To this day French mothers still frighten unruly youngsters with the dread name "Malbrouck!" a singular testimony to the immensity of his fame among his enemies.

Wellington's fame is waning with the years. It was rather the Prussians than the Iron Duke that won Waterloo. And, minus Waterloo, who but British schoolboys would today be familiar with his deeds? Of later Britons, from Raglan to Roberts, which one appears more than parochial? The modern world is not moved to etxravagant laudations of military operations which the white man conducts against the savages of Asia and the Dark Continent—and when, in the Boer war, British military talent encountered a different adversary, its terrible loss of prestige is alike so historic and so recent as to call for nothing more than mention.

Under these conditions, is it strange that the hopes and fears for a leader, a leader capable successfully of leading the allied armies to victory in a death struggle against the world's most marvelous military machine, a machine with leaders worthy of it, have for four years agonized the watchers of the skies of war? One after another British commander, applauded, apostheosized, was tried and found wanting. One after another French ones suffered the same fate. In the dark hour Foch was called upon to take supreme command and succeed where his predecessors had failed. He has begun by transforming what at first appeared like still another failure into at least a temporary success—a success which has made him a marshal of France, a success which has intoxicated two continents, but a success which is only an earnest of later successes which must come before we can acord him the laurels of the Great Leader who shall win the great war.